

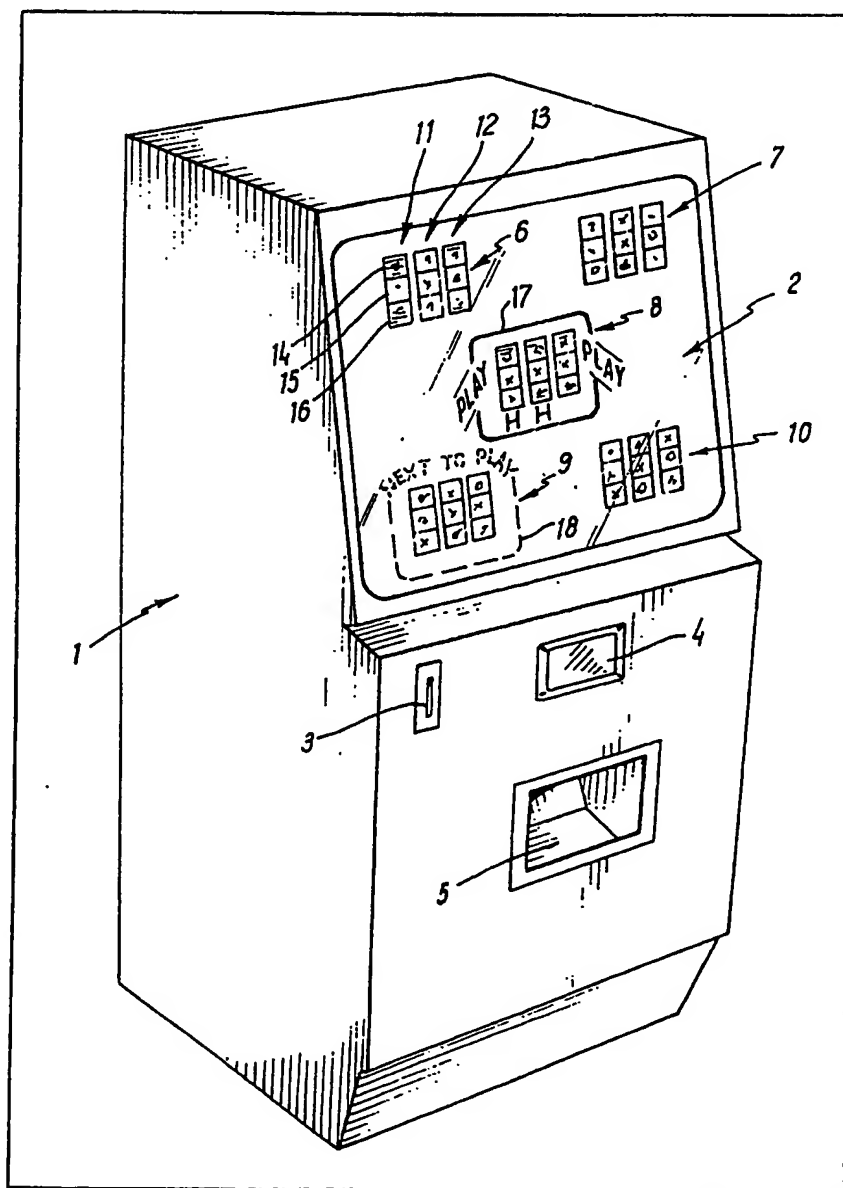
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(71) Applicant
Barcrest Limited
(Great Britain),
Richmond Street, Ashton-
under-Lyne, Lancashire
OL7 0AU
(72) Inventors
John Laurence Wain,
Robert David Bellis
(74) Agent and/or Address for
Service
Sydney E. M'Caw and Co.,
41—51 Royal Exchange,
Cross Street, Manchester
M2 7BD

(54) Entertainment machines

(57) A coin- or token-operated entertainment machine, particularly a fruit machine having rotatable reels (or simulated rotatable reels), has a number of display zones (6 to 10). On play of a game, a combination of symbols (15) is produced at one such

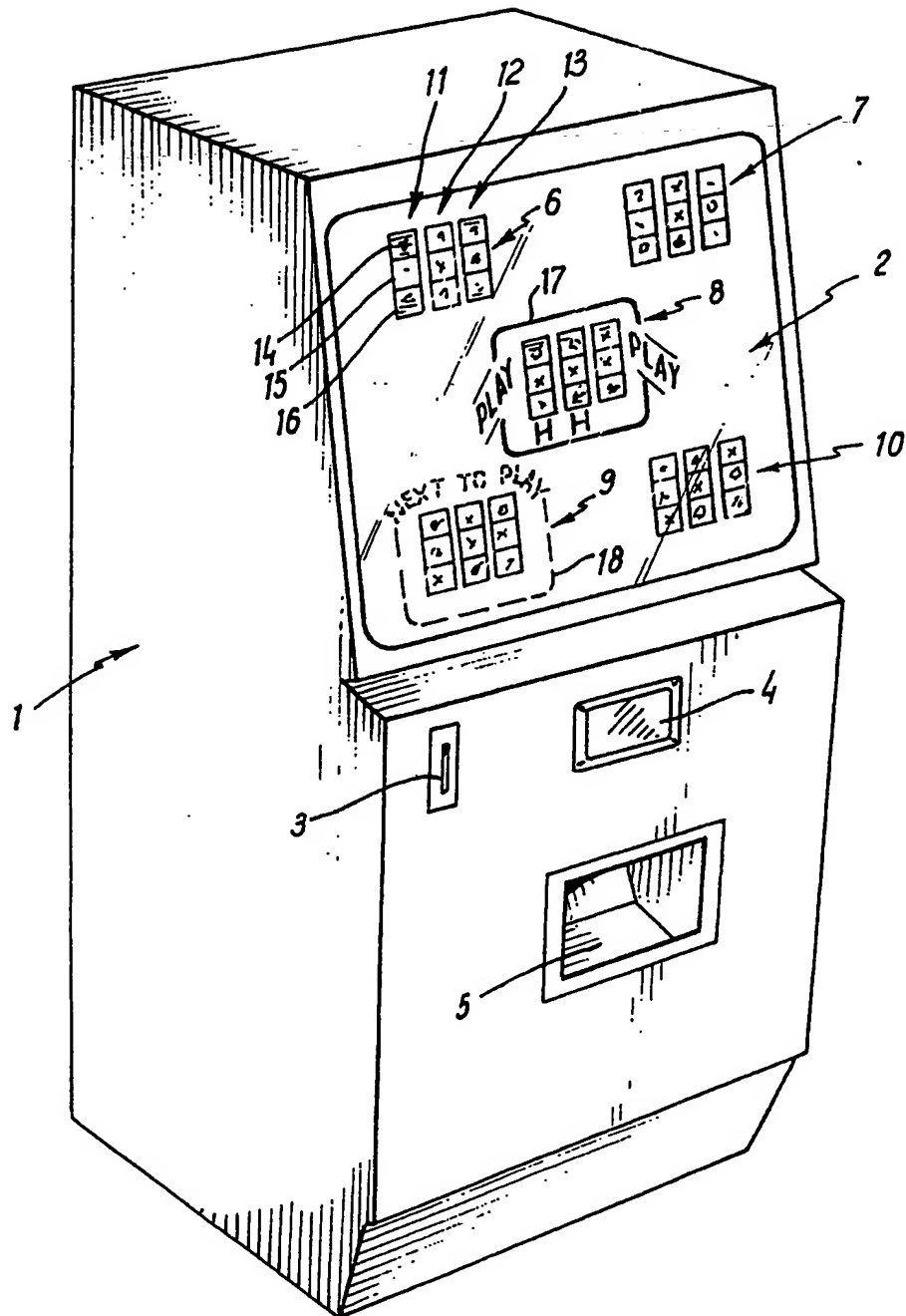
display zone, the aim being to attain a predetermined winning such combination. In subsequent games, combinations of symbols are produced at others of the display zones and the arrangement may be such that the display zones are actuated in a predetermined sequence in successive games.



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SPECIFICATION

Entertainment machines

This invention relates to a coin- or token-operated entertainment machine of the kind (hereinafter referred to as the kind described) having a set of display regions and which can be operated by a player to produce a display of one or more symbols at each of said regions of said set with the aim of attaining a winning combination thereof.

With known entertainment machines of the kind described which are of the coin-operated fruit machine type and the displayed symbols are selected at random and a win indication is produced in the event that the resulting combination thereof is of a predetermined winning nature. Rotatable reels having symbols marked around the peripheries thereof are commonly used to effect such random symbol selection although it is also known to use other random symbol selection systems including for example electronic visual display unit (vdu) systems which are operable to produce displays simulating rotatable reels on vdu screens. A vdu system of this kind is described in our published British Patent No. 1,596,363.

With such known coin operated fruit machines the number of display regions in said set may differ between machine models (usually three or four) as also may other parameters such as the number of symbols displayed simultaneously at each region, the number of symbols from which the selection is made for each region, and the number of ways in which displayed symbols are combined for win assessment purposes. However it is generally the case that only a single said set of display regions is provided whereby in so far as a player is constrained to focus his attention on the same set throughout successively played games, it is possible that an undesirable degree of monotony may be introduced and also the player may mistakenly gain the impression that an undue limitation is imposed on the variety of combinations selected for display and hence on his likelihood of attaining a winning combination.

An object of the present invention is to provide a coin- or token-operated entertainment machine of the kind described having improved display variety.

According to the invention therefore there is provided a coin- or token-operated entertainment machine having a plurality of sets of display regions and which can be operated by a player in successive game routines to produce in each said routine a display of one or more symbols at each of said regions of a respective said set with the aim of attaining a winning combination of said symbols within such set.

With this arrangement, due to the provision of multiple display sets each of which can produce a winning combination, the player is presented with an increased variety of display to the extent that the interest and entertainment value of the machine may be enhanced and the player can

more readily appreciate the true extent of the range of combinations selected for display.

Most preferably the sets of display regions are adapted to be presented to the player simultaneously at different respective zones of a front panel or screen of the machine.

Preferably also successive game routines are arranged to operate the sets in a predetermined sequence and if desired the machine may incorporate one or more indicators which identify the set which is currently being operated (or has just been operated) and/or the set which is next to be operated.

The machine may have a manual control and the arrangement may be such that the control has to be operated before performance of each game routine. Alternatively and in the case where sufficient coins or tokens have been introduced into the machine to pay for a number of games, the arrangement may be such that the machine automatically performs this number of games successively after initial actuation of the machine.

Most preferably the machine of the invention is a coin operated fruit machine as described above especially a coin-operated fruit machine having rotatable reels or a vdu screen operable to produce a display simulating rotatable reels. Also, the machine may have auxiliary controls operable for at least one and preferably all sets of display regions, such as "hold" controls which can operate at the start of a game to hold an existing displayed symbol at one or more of the display regions against change during the course of the ensuing game, and/or "nudge" controls which can operate at the end of a game to change the displayed symbol at one or more of the display regions (e.g. by sequencing the symbols stepwise at such region), and/or any other suitable control intended to modify the normal game routine with a view of improving the likelihood of winning or for any other suitable purpose. Such controls may be player-operable controls (such as manual press buttons) and/or may be controls which operate automatically. Such controls may become available for operation on a random basis. By way of example attention is directed to U.K. Patent Application No. 8136411 which describes an automatic nudge facility and to U.K. Patent Applications Nos. 2050028, 8110548 and 8136391 which disclose other kinds of auxiliary controls.

The invention will now be described further by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawing which is a diagrammatic representation of one form of a fruit machine according to the invention.

The machine is a coin-operated vdu fruit machine generally of the kind described in U.K. Patent No. 1,596,363 and comprises a floor-standing box-structure housing 1 containing a colour video tube the front screen 2 of which is exposed through an opening in a front wall of the housing. A conventional coin mechanism has a slot 3 which is mounted at the front of the housing as also is a main control switch 4 and a pay-out

chute 5. Inside the housing using the there is an electronic control system which is connected to the coin mechanism, to the control switch, to the video tube and to other mechanisms and devices as appropriate such as indicator lamps, game counters, pay-out solenoids and the like.

Generally in the manner described in U.K. Patent 1,596,363 the video tube produces at different regions on the screen 2 thereof displays simulating the peripheries of conventional fruit machine reels and at other regions decorative and/or informative displays. However, the arrangement specifically described in Patent 1,596,363 involves one set of reel-simulating displays, whereas in the present case five sets of reels are displayed simultaneously at different zones 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 on the vdu screen 2, each set comprising three display regions 11, 12, 13 simulating respectively three reels and each providing a respective display of vertical series of three fruit-containing areas 14, 15, 16, such areas of the three display regions being arranged in three horizontal rows.

In use, after actuation of the machine by insertion of one or more coins or tokens into the slot 3 (being of sufficient value for one or more games at a predetermined cost per game as indicated on the machine), and after operation of the start switch 4 by a player, the displays at the regions 11 to 13 of one of the sets 6 to 10 change in a manner simulating the rotation of reels, such change terminating (after a different random period of time for each region 11—13) with a fixed display of a series of three randomly selected fruit-containing areas 15 at each region 11—13. The set 6 to 10 selected for operation constitutes the next set immediately following the last operated set in a predetermined sequence of said sets (which may be in the sequence of the reference numerals 6 to 10). The set being operated during play of a game is indicated by means of a border temporarily displayed around the set (as indicated in the drawing in relation to set 8 by reference numeral 17) and the set next to be operated may be similarly indicated with a different temporary border around such set (as indicated in the drawing in relation to set 9 by reference numeral 18).

At the end of one game play, if the horizontally aligned central areas 15 of the three regions 11 to 13 of the pertaining set (e.g. set 8 as shown in the drawing) contains a combination of fruit which is of a predetermined winning nature, the player can obtain an appropriate award (which may be a direct pay-out of coins or tokens, an opportunity to have a further game or games etc.). When the next game is played, which may occur only after reactivation of the machine with the switch 4 or which may occur automatically following termination of the preceding game assuming that sufficient coins or tokens have been inserted to pay for more than one game, the next set (e.g. set 9 as shown in the drawing) in the predetermined sequence is operated. The procedure is repeated for subsequent sets (e.g. set 10 then set 6 and s

n) to the extent that the machine is repeatedly actuated by the same or different players and/or automatically as appropriate.

On a random basis, at the start of a game, a "hold" facility may become available on one or more "reels" of the set to be operated and this may be indicated by an appropriate indication on the vdu screen beneath the (or each) reel (as indicated in relation to set 8 by the letter 'H' in the drawing). The hold facility when utilised holds the pertaining "reel" or "reels" against change during the ensuing game and actuation of the facility may be effected only when initiated by player-operable controls or automatically under the control of a system which effects utilisation of the hold facility in the most favourable manner in the circumstances. Similarly a "nudge" facility may be made available at the end of a game on a random basis and may be utilised under the control of the player or automatically under the control of a system which effects utilisation of the nudge facility in the most favourable manner in the circumstances.

With the arrangement described above the player is presented with considerable display variety in that there are five sets of "reels" which sets come into operation sequentially when successive games are played. This can afford considerable interest and entertainment value and also the player can readily appreciate his chance of winning is truly random due to the wide range of different displays available for use in the selection of symbol combinations. The sets may operate individually at a rate comparable with conventional single-set fruit machines. Alternatively, the sets may operate more rapidly (due to the greater speed of "rotation" thereof and/or due to the smaller "size" of the "reels") so that several games can be played in rapid succession.

It is of course to be understood that the invention is not intended to be restricted to the details of the above embodiment which are described by way of example only.

110 CLAIMS

1. A coin- or token-operated entertainment machine having a plurality of sets of display regions and which can be operated by a player in successive game routines to produce in each said routine a display of one or more symbols at each of said regions of a respective set with the aim of attaining a winning combination of said symbols within such set.

2. A machine according to claim 1, wherein the sets of display regions are adapted to be presented to the player simultaneously at different respective zones of a front panel or screen of the machine.

4. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 3, incorporating one or more indicators which identify the set which is currently being operated or has just been operated.

5. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 4, incorporating one or more indicators which

identify the set which is next to be operated.

- 5 6. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5, incorporating a manual control which is required to be operated before performance of each game routine.

- 10 7. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5, which is arranged to perform automatically a number of games successively after initial actuation of the machine in the case where sufficient coins or tokens have been introduced

into the machine to pay for such number of games.

- 15 8. A machine according to any one of claim 1 to 7, which is a coin-operated fruit machine having rotatable reels or a vdu screen operable to produce a display simulating rotatable reels.

- 20 9. A coin- or token-operated entertainment machine substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.